



## **European Site Conservation Objectives: Supplementary advice on conserving and restoring site features**

**Parkgate Down Special Area of Conservation (SAC)  
UK0030338**



Monkey Orchid © Natural England

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## **About this document**

This document provides Natural England's supplementary advice about the European Site Conservation Objectives relating to Parkgate Down SAC.

This advice should therefore be read together with the SAC Conservation Objectives available [here](#).

You should use the Conservation Objectives, this Supplementary Advice and any case-specific advice given by Natural England when developing, proposing or assessing an activity, plan or project that may affect this site'

This Supplementary Advice to the Conservation Objectives presents attributes which are ecological characteristics of the designated species and habitats within a site. The listed attributes are considered to be those that best describe the site's ecological integrity and which, if safeguarded, will enable achievement of the Conservation Objectives. Each attribute has a target which is either quantified or qualitative depending on the available evidence. The target identifies as far as possible the desired state to be achieved for the attribute.

The tables provided below bring together the findings of the best available scientific evidence relating to the site's qualifying features, which may be updated or supplemented in further publications from Natural England and other sources. The local evidence used in preparing this supplementary advice has been cited. The references to the national evidence used are available on request. Where evidence and references have not been indicated, Natural England has applied ecological knowledge and expert judgement. You may decide to use other additional sources of information.

In many cases, the attribute targets shown in the tables indicate whether the current objective is to 'maintain' or 'restore' the attribute. This is based on the best available information, including that gathered during monitoring of the feature's current condition. As new information on feature condition becomes available, this will be added so that the advice remains up to date.

The targets given for each attribute do not represent thresholds to assess the significance of any given impact in Habitats Regulations Assessments. You will need to assess this on a case-by-case basis using the most current information available.

Some, but not all, of these attributes can also be used for regular monitoring of the actual condition of the designated features. The attributes selected for monitoring the features, and the standards used to assess their condition, are listed in separate monitoring documents, which will be available from Natural England.

These tables do not give advice about SSSI features or other legally protected species which may also be present within the European Site.

**If you have any comments or queries about this Supplementary Advice document please contact your local Natural England adviser or email [HDIRConservationObjectivesNE@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:HDIRConservationObjectivesNE@naturalengland.org.uk)**

## About this site

### European Site information

<b>Name of European Site</b>	Parkgate Down Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
<b>Location</b>	Kent
<b>Site Map</b>	The designated boundary of this site can be viewed <a href="#">here</a> on the MAGIC website
<b>Designation Date</b>	1 April 2005
<b>Qualifying Features</b>	See section below
<b>Designation Area</b>	6.94ha
<b>Designation Changes</b>	N/A
<b>Feature Condition Status</b>	Details of the feature condition assessments made at this site can be found using Natural England's <a href="#">Designated Sites System</a>
<b>Names of component Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)</b>	Parkgate Down SSSI
<b>Relationship with other European or International Site designations</b>	N/A

### Site background and geography

Parkgate Down is situated on the chalk of the North Downs National Character Area ([NCA Profile 119](#)) on the west-facing slope of a dry valley. The grassland is dominated by tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and fescues *Festuca* spp. A wide range of typical chalk downland plants are also present including dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* and salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*. Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris* also occurs here and the scarce slender bedstraw *Galium pumilum* is found at the north end. The site contains an outstanding assemblage of orchids including the nationally rare monkey orchid *Orchis simia* and late spider orchid *Ophrys fuciflora*, together with the nationally scarce musk orchid *Herminium monorchis* and lady orchid *Orchis purpurea*.

## About the qualifying features of the SAC

The following section gives you additional, site-specific information about this SAC's qualifying features. These are the natural habitats and/or species for which this SAC has been designated.

### Qualifying habitats:

- **H6211 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia)**

This site hosts the priority habitat type "orchid rich sites". Parkgate Down is situated on the chalk of the North Downs and consists largely of NVC type CG4 *Brachypodium pinnatum* grassland. The site contains an outstanding assemblage of orchids including the nationally rare monkey orchid *Orchis simia* and late spider orchid *Ophrys fuciflora* together with the nationally scarce musk orchid *Herminium monorchis* and lady orchid *Orchis purpurea*.

### Qualifying Species:

- N/A

**Table 1: Supplementary Advice for Qualifying Features: H6210. Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (important orchid sites); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites) \***

Attributes		Targets	Supporting and Explanatory Notes	Sources of site-based evidence (where available)
<b>Extent and distribution of the feature</b>	<b>Extent of the feature within the site</b>	Maintain the total extent of the H6210 grassland feature estimated to be approximately 4.1ha, subject to natural changes.	<p>There should be no measurable reduction (excluding any trivial loss) in the extent and area of this feature, and in some cases, the full extent of the feature may need to be restored. The baseline-value of extent given has been generated using data gathered from the listed site-based surveys. Area measurements given may be approximate depending on the methods, age and accuracy of data collection, and as a result this value may be updated in future to reflect more accurate information.</p> <p>The extent of an Annex I habitat feature covers the sum extent of all of the component vegetation communities present and may include transitions and mosaics with other closely-associated habitat features. Where a feature is susceptible to natural dynamic processes, there may be acceptable variations in its extent through natural fluctuations.</p> <p>Where a reduction in the extent of a feature is considered necessary to meet the Conservation Objective for another Annex I feature, Natural England will advise on this on a case-by-case basis.</p>	Natural England (2013) Definition of Favourable Condition – Parkgate Down SSSI (Available from Natural England on request)
<b>Extent and distribution of the feature</b>	<b>Spatial distribution of the feature within the site</b>	Restore the distribution and configuration of the H6210 feature, including where applicable its component vegetation types, across the site	<p>A contraction in the range, or geographic spread, of the feature (and its component vegetation and typical species, plus transitional communities) across the site will reduce its overall area, the local diversity and variations in its structure and composition and may undermine its resilience to adapt to future environmental changes. This may also reduce and break up the continuity of a habitat within a site and how well its typical species are able to move around the site to occupy and use habitat. Such fragmentation can impact on their viability and the wider ecological composition of the Annex I habitat.</p> <p>Smaller fragments of habitat can typically support smaller and more isolated populations which are more vulnerable to extinction. These fragments also have a greater amount of open edge habitat which will differ in the amount of light, temperature, wind, and even noise that it receives compared to</p>	<p>Natural England (2013) Definition of Favourable Condition – Parkgate Down SSSI (Available from Natural England on request)</p> <p>NATURAL ENGLAND. (2015) <a href="#">Parkgate Down SAC Site Improvement Plan</a> (SIP Profile 165)</p>

Attributes		Targets	Supporting and Explanatory Notes	Sources of site-based evidence (where available)
			<p>its interior. These conditions may not be suitable for some of the typical and more specialist species associated with the Annex I habitat feature.</p> <p>Habitat fragmentation was identified as a threat in the site improvement plan.</p>	
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Vegetation community composition</b>	<p>Ensure the component vegetation communities of the feature are referable to and characterised by the following National Vegetation Classification types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CG4 <i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>;</li> <li>• CG5 <i>Bromus erectus</i> – <i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i></li> </ul>	<p>This habitat feature will comprise a number of associated semi-natural vegetation types and their transitional zones, reflecting the geographical location of the site, altitude, aspect, soil conditions (especially base-status and drainage) and vegetation management. In the UK these have been categorised by the National Vegetation Classification (NVC).</p> <p>Maintaining or restoring these characteristic and distinctive vegetation types, and the range of types as appropriate, will be important to sustaining the overall habitat feature. This will also help to conserve their typical plant species (i.e. the constant and preferential species of a community), and therefore that of the SAC feature, at appropriate levels (recognising natural fluctuations).</p>	<p>Natural England (2013) Definition of Favourable Condition – Parkgate Down SSSI (Available from Natural England on request)</p> <p>This attribute will be periodically monitored as part of Natural England's <a href="#">SSSI Condition Assessments</a></p>
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Vegetation: proportion of herbs (including Carex spp )</b>	Maintain the proportion of herbaceous species within the range 40%-90%	A high cover of characteristic herbs, including sedges ( <i>Carex</i> species) is typical of the structure of this habitat type.	<p>Natural England (2013) Definition of Favourable Condition – Parkgate Down SSSI (Available from Natural England on request)</p> <p>This attribute will be periodically monitored as part of Natural England's <a href="#">SSSI Condition Assessments</a></p>
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Key structural, influential and/or distinctive species</b>	<p>Maintain the abundance of the typical species listed below to enable each of them to be a viable component of the Annex 1 habitat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constant and preferential species of the CG4</li> </ul>	<p>Some plant or animal species (or related groups of such species) make a particularly important contribution to the necessary structure, function and/or quality of an Annex I habitat feature at a particular site. These species will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural species which form a key part of the Annex I habitat's structure or help to define that habitat on a particular SAC (see also the attribute for 'vegetation community</li> </ul>	<p>Natural England (2013) Definition of Favourable Condition – Parkgate Down SSSI (Available from Natural England on request)</p> <p>This attribute will be periodically monitored as part of Natural England's <a href="#">SSSI Condition</a></p>

Attributes		Targets	Supporting and Explanatory Notes	Sources of site-based evidence (where available)
		<p><i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>; and CG5 <i>Bromus erectus</i> – <i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i> grassland NVC communities which form the H6210 feature within this SAC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important orchid populations including: <i>Orchis simia</i> Monkey Orchid; <i>Ophrys fuciflora</i> Late Spider Orchid; <i>Orchis purpurea</i> Lady Orchid; <i>Herminium monorchis</i> Musk Orchid</li> <li>• <i>Galium pumilum</i> Slender bedstraw</li> </ul>	<p>composition’).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential species which are likely to have a key role affecting the structure and function of the habitat (such as bioturbators (mixers of soil/sediment), grazers, surface borers, predators or other species with a significant functional role linked to the habitat)</li> <li>• Site-distinctive species which are considered to be a particularly special and distinguishing component of an Annex I habitat on a particular SAC.</li> </ul> <p>There may be natural fluctuations in the frequency and cover of each of these species. The relative contribution made by them to the overall ecological integrity of a site may vary, and Natural England will provide bespoke advice on this as necessary. The list of species given here for this Annex I habitat feature at this SAC is not necessarily exhaustive. The list may evolve, and species may be added or deleted, as new information about this site becomes available.</p>	<p><a href="#">Assessments</a></p>
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Vegetation: undesirable species</b>	<p>Maintain the frequency/cover of the following undesirable species to within acceptable levels and prevent changes in surface condition, soils, nutrient levels or hydrology which may encourage their spread:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undesirable species should be no more than occasional throughout the sward or singly or together more than 5% cover</li> <li>• Coarse grasses individually or collectively, should be no more than 10% cover</li> </ul>	<p>There will be a range of undesirable or uncharacteristic species which, if allowed to colonise and spread, are likely to have an adverse effect on the feature's structure and function, including its more desirable typical species. These may include invasive non-natives such as <i>Cotoneaster</i> spp, or coarse and aggressive native species which may uncharacteristically dominate the composition of the feature.</p> <p>Undesirable species include: <i>Cirsium arvense</i>, <i>Cirsium vulgare</i>, <i>Rumex crispus</i>, <i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>, <i>Senecio jacobaea</i> and <i>Urtica dioica</i></p> <p>Coarse grasses include <i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>, <i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>, <i>Bromopsis erecta</i> and <i>Dactylis glomerata</i>,</p>	<p>Natural England (2013) Definition of Favourable Condition – Parkgate Down SSSI (Available from Natural England on request)</p> <p>This attribute will be periodically monitored as part of Natural England's <a href="#">SSSI Condition Assessments</a></p>



Attributes		Targets	Supporting and Explanatory Notes	Sources of site-based evidence (where available)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tree and scrub cover should be approximately 5%</li> </ul>		
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Vegetation community transitions</b>	Maintain the pattern of natural vegetation zonations/transitions	Transitions/zonations between adjacent but different vegetation communities are usually related to naturally-occurring changes in soil, aspect or slope. Such 'ecotones' retain characteristics of each bordering community and can add value in often containing species not found in the adjacent communities. Retaining such transitions can provide further diversity to the habitat feature, and support additional flora and fauna.	
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Soils, substrate and nutrient cycling</b>	Maintain the properties of the underlying soil types, including structure, bulk density, total carbon, pH, soil nutrient status and fungal: bacterial ratio, to within typical values for the habitat.	Soil is the foundation of basic ecosystem function and its properties strongly influence the colonisation, growth and distribution of those plant species which together form vegetation types, and therefore provides a habitat used by a wide range of organisms.  Soil biodiversity has a vital role to recycle organic matter. Changes to natural soil properties may therefore affect the ecological structure, function and processes associated with this Annex I feature.	
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Supporting off-site habitat</b>	Maintain the extent, quality and spatial configuration of land or habitat surrounding or adjacent to the site which is known to support the H6210 feature	Include only where applicable. The structure and function of the qualifying habitat, including its typical species, may rely upon the continued presence of areas which surround and are outside of the designated site boundary. Changes in surrounding land-use may adversely (directly/indirectly) affect the functioning of the feature and its component species. This supporting habitat may be critical to the typical species of the feature to support their feeding, breeding, roosting, population dynamics ('metapopulations'), pollination or to prevent/reduce/absorb damaging impacts from adjacent land uses e.g. pesticide drift, nutrient enrichment.	
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Functional connectivity with wider landscape</b>	Maintain the overall extent, quality and function of any supporting features within the local landscape which provide a critical functional connection with the site	This recognises the potential need at this site to maintain or restore the connectivity of the site to its wider landscape in order to meet the conservation objectives. These connections may take the form of landscape features, such as habitat patches, hedges, watercourses and verges, outside of the designated site boundary which are either important for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of those typical species closely associated with qualifying Annex I habitat	



Attributes		Targets	Supporting and Explanatory Notes	Sources of site-based evidence (where available)
			features of the site. These features may also be important to the operation of the supporting ecological processes on which the designated site and its features may rely. In most cases increasing actual and functional landscape-scale connectivity would be beneficial. Where there is a lack of detailed knowledge of the connectivity requirements of the qualifying feature, Natural England will advise as to whether these are applicable on a case by case basis.	
<b>Structure and function (including its typical species)</b>	<b>Adaptation and resilience</b>	Maintain the feature's ability, and that of its supporting processes, to adapt or evolve to wider environmental change, either within or external to the site	<p>This recognises the increasing likelihood of natural habitat features to absorb or adapt to wider environmental changes. Resilience may be described as the ability of an ecological system to cope with, and adapt to environmental stress and change whilst retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning. Such environmental changes may include changes in sea levels, precipitation and temperature for example, which are likely to affect the extent, distribution, composition and functioning of a feature within a site. The vulnerability and response of features to such changes will vary.</p> <p>Using best available information, any necessary or likely adaptation or adjustment by the feature and its management in response to actual or expected climatic change should be allowed for, as far as practicable, in order to ensure the feature's long-term viability.</p> <p>The overall vulnerability of this SAC to climate change has been assessed by Natural England (2015) as being low, taking into account the sensitivity, fragmentation, topography and management of its habitats. This means that this site is considered to be vulnerable overall but are a lower priority for further assessment and action. Individual species may be more or less vulnerable than their supporting habitat itself. In many cases, change will be inevitable so appropriate monitoring would be advisable.</p>	NATURAL ENGLAND. (2015). Climate Change Theme Plan and supporting National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability assessments ('NBCCVAs') for SACs and SPAs in England [Available at <a href="http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4954594591375360">http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4954594591375360</a> ].
<b>Supporting processes (on which the</b>	<b>Air quality</b>	Maintain, the concentrations and deposition of air pollutants to at or below the site-relevant Critical	This habitat type is considered sensitive to changes in air quality. Exceedance of these critical values for air pollutants may modify the chemical status of its substrate, accelerating or	More information about site-relevant Critical Loads and Levels for this SAC is available by using

Attributes		Targets	Supporting and Explanatory Notes	Sources of site-based evidence (where available)
<b>feature relies)</b>		Load or Level values given for this feature of the site on the Air Pollution Information System ( <a href="http://www.apis.ac.uk">www.apis.ac.uk</a> ).	<p>damaging plant growth, altering its vegetation structure and composition and causing the loss of sensitive typical species associated with it.</p> <p>Critical Loads and Levels are recognised thresholds below which such harmful effects on sensitive UK habitats will not occur to a significant level, according to current levels of scientific understanding. There are critical levels for ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>), oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>) and sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), and critical loads for nutrient nitrogen deposition and acid deposition. There are currently no critical loads or levels for other pollutants such as Halogens, Heavy Metals, POPs, VOCs or Dusts. These should be considered as appropriate on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>Ground level ozone is regionally important as a toxic air pollutant but flux-based critical levels for the protection of semi-natural habitats are still under development. It is recognised that achieving this target may be subject to the development, availability and effectiveness of abatement technology and measures to tackle diffuse air pollution, within realistic timescales.</p> <p>There are concerns about the risk of atmospheric nitrogen deposition which have been flagged as needing further investigation but currently the critical load for the site is within acceptable limits. Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr): 16.4 which is between Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr): 15-25</p>	<p>the 'search by site' tool on the Air Pollution Information System (<a href="http://www.apis.ac.uk">www.apis.ac.uk</a>).</p> <p>NATURAL ENGLAND. (2015) <a href="#">Parkgate Down SAC Site Improvement Plan</a> (SIP Profile 165)</p>
<b>Supporting processes (on which the feature relies)</b>	<b>Conservation measures</b>	Maintain the management measures (either within and/or outside the site boundary as appropriate) which are necessary to maintain the structure, functions and supporting processes associated with the feature	<p>Active and ongoing conservation management is needed to protect, maintain or restore this feature at this site. Further details about the necessary conservation measures for this site can be provided by contacting Natural England.</p> <p>This information will typically be found within, where applicable, supporting documents such as Natura 2000 Site Improvement Plan, Site Management Strategies or Plans, the Views about Management Statement for the underpinning SSSI and/or management agreements.</p>	NATURAL ENGLAND. (2015) <a href="#">Parkgate Down SAC Site Improvement Plan</a> (SIP Profile 165)

Attributes		Targets	Supporting and Explanatory Notes	Sources of site-based evidence (where available)
			The site improvement plan identifies habitat fragmentation as a threat.	
<b>Version Control</b>				
Advice last updated: N/A				
<b>Variations from national feature-framework of integrity-guidance:</b> N/A				